ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Case File No. AA-085091
AK-040-03-EA-011

Applicant: Trailside Discovery

Type of Action: Special Recreation Permit
Outdoor Environmental Education

Location: Campbell Tract Special Recreation Area

Prepared By: Douglas Ballou
Outdoor Recreation Planner

Preparing Office: Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office
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Date: June 30, 2003

I. INTRODUCTION

The Campbell Tract (CT) is a 730 acre Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) of natural, mostly wooded, public land located within the city limits of the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). The primary purpose of the CT is to support the administrative functions and offices for the Anchorage Field Office (AFO) of the BLM. The CT is centered around the Campbell Airstrip, a 5,000' gravel runway dating to 1942, that is used by the BLM and other agencies for various government purposes. Miles of multi-use non-motorized trails on the CT provide year-round recreational opportunities for approximately 40,000 user days. The CT is adjacent to, and management is coordinated with, the 4,000-acre MOA Far North Bicentennial Park (FNBP), forming a contiguous piece of natural public and park land linking the high mountains of Chugach State Park to the heart of Anchorage.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide for discovery and learning experiences that increase awareness, understanding and appreciation for the natural process and cycles of the subarctic environment in Southcentral Alaska. Many independent outdoor education groups stage out of CCSC and utilize CT as a natural, wilderness-like activity area in close proximity to Anchorage to promote an understanding and appreciation of Alaskan ecosystems.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

This action is in conformance with the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), dated March 1980.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

Permits for commercial recreation use are regulated by 43 CFR 2930. With this regulation an applicant may be authorized to conduct commercial recreation activities on BLM-administered land. The Authorized Officer may issue Special Recreation Permits for up to five years subject to annual re-authorization. The permittee must satisfactorily meet the requirements associated with the Special Recreation Permit as well as conform with applicable laws and regulations.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to conduct a variety of outdoor environmental education day-use programs on CT for area children. Trailside Discovery (TD), a non-profit branch of the Alaska Center for the Environment, plans to present eleven one-week summer programs and two weekly winter programs during the calendar year on CT. The mission of TD is "to provide a broad range of outdoor environmental education experiences for students of all ages and from all economic, social, and

ethnic backgrounds". TD rents the CCSC facility for each weekly session and utilizes various sites on CT for their outdoor environmental education activities.

The participants in summer programs range in age from 4 through 13 years of age and may be on-site at CT for up to 8 hours per day, Monday through Friday, for each weekly session. Students are physically checked into the TD program each morning of a week session by parents or guardians, and picked up and checked out at the end of each day. No overnight activity is associated with TD programs on CT. Younger age group students tend to operate on CT for the entire week session. Older students tend to spend the first few days of the week on CT and then move off-site for more advanced outdoor skills experiences to areas including Chugach and Denali State Parks, Homer, and Seward. This causes the TD student population on CT to fluctuate from a maximum of 130 students early in the week to as low as 50 per day starting Wednesday afternoon.

A five-day winter program spread over two weeks is offered during the traditional December/Christmas school break and a one-week winter session is offered during the school spring break in March. These non-summer sessions serve up to 24 students learning a variety of snow-season nature and outdoor skills including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, orienteering, winter survival techniques, animal tracking, winter ecology and wildlife. Students spend up to five hours per day in the field on CT and the balance of their time inside CCSC where they receive classroom instruction, snack breaks, and meals. Winter outdoor activities utilize a radius of approximately ½ mile from the CCSC. Virtually all activities in the field occur on accumulated snow pack above frozen ground. Students walk, ski and snowshoe within this training radius, and utilize accumulated snow to construct temporary snow shelters.

Summer session instruction teams typically utilize a range of up to one mile from CCSC for their outdoor education activities including woodland sites and streamside sites along the South Fork of Campbell Creek and Little Campbell Creek.

Instructional groups of students utilize five designated open-field activity areas to conduct educational programs that require large open areas including the grassy leach-field area in front of CCSC, the large field 400 yards east of CCSC, a re-vegetated WWII aircraft revetment located on the science center access road 1/8 mile south of CCSC, a grassy field located at the Campbell Airstrip Trailhead (mile 1.1 off the Campbell Airstrip Road), and the grassy areas immediately behind the CCSC. Instructors rotate use of these areas weekly to minimize impact. Woodland activities are provided at various established sites surrounding CCSC that are also used year-round by CCSC staff. Access to these sites is

gained on designated and well-marked trails to reduce impacts to surrounding vegetation.

Dispersed areas of woodlands within ¼ mile of CCSC are utilized for nature study, tracking, and other outdoor skills activities. CCSC instructors coordinate use of these areas on a daily basis to reduce impacts on any single site. TD instructors are responsible for closely monitoring and controlling student groups in off-trail areas to minimize impacts to CT resources.

Down and dead logs and sticks will be utilized to teach survival and camping skills. Very small amounts of leaves, moss, and other vegetative materials may be collected in the course of nature study. Dead logs, sticks, rocks, and other natural products will be returned to natural positions in areas collected upon completion of each day's activities. Dead sticks may be discretely stockpiled for repeated use in activity areas, to be scattered into the environment at the end of the summer season. No cutting of live vegetation beyond the collection of sample leaves is allowed.

Streamside activities include capturing and identifying aquatic insects and micro-organisms utilizing waders and dip nets, measuring and analyzing various stream parameters and water chemistry, and observing fish and other riparian fauna. Regular streamside activities occur on existing gravel bars at two designated sites accessed by marked and established trails to reduce stream bank erosion along the rest of the stream course.

Instructors are charged with close monitoring of students at all times to prevent vegetation cutting and limb removal, habitat destruction, wildlife harassment, rock and stick throwing, social trail development, and other inappropriate outdoors behavior detrimental to the environmental health of CT. Instructors are required to promote a stewardship ethic in the conduct of their educational activities and serve as role models for students at all times. Leave No Trace principles will be practiced in the execution of all outdoors activities and programs. Instructors will immediately report incidents of habitat and wildlife destruction to TD supervisors, who are responsible for timely notification of the BLM authorized official. The TD program manager is responsible for the monitoring of individual instructors for compliance with environmental and safety stipulations established for use of CT.

To reduce the potential for negative wildlife encounters all lunches will be consumed inside the science center building. Snacks may be carried into the field on long hikes of two hours or more, but must be double-bagged to prevent attracting bears. All garbage and food remains associated with this exception will

be gathered and stored in double bags. All other snacks must be consumed inside the science center building.

A maximum of approximately 80 vehicles are expected to converge on the science center during both the thirty minute morning and afternoon high-traffic student delivery periods. The TD program director is responsible for notifying parents and guardians of appropriate drop-off and pick up sites and procedures, speed and parking restrictions on the CCSC access road, and to encourage reduced vehicle traffic by promoting and facilitating carpooling during the summer season. TD will provide staff to direct and control vehicle traffic in the CCSC parking lot area during the morning and afternoon high-traffic periods. TD program managers will be responsible for educating parents on the proper preparation of students for day-long outdoor exposure.

The BLM authorized official will conduct periodic audits of TD programs and activities and monitor changes to the environment in established activity areas, stream bank sites, and dispersed use areas. The authorized official will coordinate durable group assembly locations with TD managers and monitor impacts from regular use.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative is to continue present management of the CT. Under this alternative, management practices and resource uses would remain the same. The use proposed by Trailside Discovery would not occur.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

It has been determined that the following Critical Elements are either not present or would not be adversely affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Environmental Justice, Farmlands (prime or unique), Floodplains, Invasive, Non-native Species, Native American Religious Concerns, Wastes (Hazardous/Solid), Water Quality (Surface and Ground), Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness.

1. Cultural Resources:

The CT contains scattered World War II remains dating from 1942 when a 5,000 foot military airstrip and support facilities were constructed to support nearby Ft. Richardson. War related improvements included an airstrip, taxiways, and revetments for aircraft use and various sod structures for housing and administrative functions including quarters, a kitchen and mess hall, latrines, and guard posts. These facilities were

constructed from sod and locally available materials due to a shortage of building supplies and now appear as shallow pits and earth mounds covered with vegetation and overgrown concrete foundations with occasional scattered boards and nails. Most of these cultural sites and remains lie off the north end of the existing Campbell Airstrip.

2. Threatened and Endangered Species:
No threatened or endangered species are known to be found on the CT.

3. Subsistence:
The CT lands are Federal Public Land as defined in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Section 810 and fall under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Board and the Subsistence Regulations for the Harvest of Fish and Wildlife on Federal Public Lands in Alaska. The CT lies within the Anchorage Management Unit of Game Management Unit 14C under which the current Subsistence Regulations noted above is closed to the taking of wildlife under both State (hunting and trapping) and Federal Subsistence Regulations. The taking of wildlife on the CT is further limited by Supplemental Rules issued on November 20, 1998 under 43 CFR 8365.1-6 that closed the CT to the use of firearms, archery equipment, traps, or snares. The CT has no documented consistent use by rural Alaskans of fish or game and no knowledge of such use has become available since the inception of the Federal Subsistence Program or the issuance of the noted Supplementary Rules.

B. Recreation:
The CT is designated for non-motorized recreational use. Recreation management for the CT is directed by the June 1988 "A Management Plan for Public Use and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility". There are approximately 11 miles of developed recreation trails on CT. Some of these trails link to a wider trail system on the adjoining MOA FNBP. The proximity of the CT to urban Anchorage places high demands on the site from a variety of users. Most recreation occurs on trails that were developed on old tank roads and airplane taxiways.

Access for recreation use on CT is gained from three formal on-site trailheads and four trails entering from FNBP. Established trailheads with parking include the Smoke Jumper Trailhead located at the main Campbell Tract Facility AFO complex entrance, the Campbell Airstrip Trailhead located at mile 1.1 on Campbell Airstrip Road, and the Lore Road Trailhead located on Abbott Loop Road, one half mile south of the main BLM entrance road. Trail maintenance,

signing, and event permitting is a cooperative effort between the BLM, MOA Parks Department, and various volunteers and user groups.

Recreation users are primarily residents of Anchorage and surrounding communities. Estimated 2002 visitation was 40,000 user days. Users are typically found walking, running, mountain biking, skiing, snowshoeing, dog mushing and horseback riding throughout the CT. Many users live close to CT and use the area regularly for exercise, often with their family dogs. Regular competitive events, often starting on FNBP lands traverse CT including the Nordic Ski Club's Tour of Anchorage and the World Sled Dog Championship Races.

C. Vegetation:

The CT contains a variety of habitats including spruce and birch forests, bogs, and riparian areas. Cottonwood and birch dating to the WWII era dominate the woodlands, interspersed with less mature white spruce, numbers of which have experienced high rates of recent beetle kill. The understory is comprised of shrubs, forbs, lichens and moss above a ground cover of heavy organic litter.

D. Wildlife:

The CT contains a rich diversity of resident and non-resident wildlife. Resident species include moose, porcupine, mink, weasel, red squirrel, muskrat, beaver, snowshoe hare, voles, and shrews and at least 50 species of resident and non-resident birds including horned owl, northern saw-whet owl, boreal owl, northern goshawk, and spruce grouse. Non-resident species moving seasonally through CT to and from the Chugach Mountains to the east include grizzly bear and black bear, red fox, lynx and wolf. The South Fork of Campbell Creek traverses the northeast corner of CT. This stream supports populations of king and silver salmon, as well as rainbow trout, Dolly varden, and spiny sculpin.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Elements:

   a. Cultural Resources:

   Existing cultural resources may be damaged from people walking over them, crumbling debris mounds and collapsing pit walls during the non-winter season. When the ground is frozen, people will have little impact on these surface resources. Surface artifacts are often exposed by natural soil processes and could be removed from the site by individuals attending outdoor education sessions.

2. Recreation:
Users on CT are often seeking the solitude and quiet of the wooded tract to escape the noise and congestion of Anchorage. Outdoor education and field activities near the multi-use trails may visually impact upon the visitor experience and reduce this sense of peace and solitude. Education activities may also increase noise levels for other CT users if conducted near multi-use trails. Rocks and sticks left near trails by students may pose safety hazards to other users. Poorly supervised children may wander into heavily used multi-purpose trails and may interfere with, or be endangered by, mountain bikers, horse users, or dog sled teams.

3. Vegetation:
Trampling of vegetation and/or compaction of snow at outdoor activity sites, up to 10 meters in diameter, will occur. Open grassy areas adjacent to the CCSC will become trampled and bare. Social trails may develop if multiple routes or shortcuts are used to access frequently used activity areas. Some individual tree branches may suffer damage from being cut, thrashed, or pulled down by students. Poorly supervised children may dig holes in the forest floor disturbing vegetation and forest litter. Streamside vegetation and stream banks may be impacted and eroded if multiple stream access points are used.

4. Wildlife:
Outdoor training sessions may have local, short-term impacts on CT wildlife. In winter months, moose, snowshoe hare and other animals that browse and use forested habitats may be temporarily displaced.

Populations of birds and mammals may be impacted by training activities that occur in the animals feeding or reproductive habitat. Birds may not reproduce or leave the area for the season if disturbed during breeding season. Wildlife encounters may occur in all seasons. Moose and bear are potentially dangerous. Streamside activities could impact spawning salmon and increase siltation downstream.

B. Impacts of No Action Alternative:
The effects of current management practices and user traffic will continue to impact CT including 15,000 annual student visits utilizing the grounds adjacent to the CCSC and approximately 40,000 user days of recreational activities on CT. Wildlife, streamside sites, forest areas and recreational trails will experience continued heavy use and will receive periodic scheduled maintenance and monitoring.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

The population of the Anchorage Bowl continues to increase each year placing ever greater demands on public lands providing outdoor education and recreation opportunities. Impacts of TD use on CT will result in a greater human presence on the landscape and natural communities of CT. Increased trail, forest impacts and wildlife disturbance are obvious outcomes of this heavier use. User experience and perception of solitude may also be modified by this increase in use.

D. Mitigation Measures:

1. Critical Elements:

   a. Cultural Resources:

      Training sites should be located in areas where cultural resources are not present. Pre-summer season training should be provided to increase instructor awareness of value and types of cultural resources found on CT and areas to avoid when conducting activities. Instructors should discuss with students prohibitions on picking up, disturbing or destroying cultural resources prior to field activities.

2. Recreation:

   TD instructors should be coached to utilize training sites away from heavily used multi-use trails to reduce impact on other user's recreation experience and reduce the possibility of accidents and conflicts. Winter activities should be prohibited within 50 feet of established dog sled trails. Instructors should not allow students to construct piles of rocks and branches on CT.

3. Vegetation:

   Training sites and activity areas should be located away from sensitive habitat areas including stream banks and areas of unique vegetation. Instructors should be limited to two established streamside sites to access the stream for science related streamside activities. Students should be prohibited from cutting live vegetation, purposely damaging trees and plants, or removing more than a few leaves per student for plant identification activities. Students should also be prohibited from digging in or disturbing the forest floor and should be required to put back any rocks or sticks collected for natural history studies. Students should be allowed to dig only in a designated, previously disturbed, site when conducting archeology education activities. Trails to regularly used activity areas should be identified and instructors should be responsible for keeping students on established trails when accessing these areas.

4. Wildlife:
   Activities should be scheduled when wildlife will be least impacted. Instructors should prevent students from harassing or destroying wildlife and obvious habitat including salmon and stream beds, birds and nests, and other CT habitat and species.

   Instructors should notify CCSC desk staff of bear and moose sightings and should follow the Wild Animal Response Policy for CT. Instructors should carry bear spray during spring, summer, and fall months, as well as communication devices and first aid kits while in the field. When bear and moose encounters are likely, outdoor activities should be relocated or moved inside the CCSC to reduce or eliminate injury to people or wildlife.

   To reduce the possibility of wildlife encounters, all lunches and snacks should be consumed inside the CCSC. Consumption or transportation of food and snacks should not be permitted in the field with the exception that snacks could be allowed on scheduled hikes that will be away from CCSC for more than two hours. In these cases, double bagged snacks can be transported into the field and consumed, and post-consumption packaging and food should be double bagged and removed promptly to reduce the potential of attracting wildlife.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:

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